

...The Unexpected

Travis Rusheon Vardell wrote in the Christian Science Monitor about an incident that provided a moment of joy for at least two people.

The writer, while stuck in traffic, glanced out of his car window and into the window of a music shop where a piano was on display. "At it sat a man who, by his rapt expression, was playing it for all it was worth," Vardell wrote.

"Though I could not hear a single note, I watched him pantomime his song. When he finished... I caught his eye, held my hands up and applauded rapidly and silently, mouthing the words—'Bravol Bravol!'"

"He stood... turned in my direction and there in the store window bowed deeply in his best maestro fashion. Then we both laughed, the light changed and I drove off, pleased with myself, my fellowman and life in general."

Kill Joys

Here are some enemies of joy to avoid:

Self-Pity—How can I be joyful when I have to suffer so much?

Pessimism—How can I be joyful when there are so many problems in the world today?

Envy—How can I be joyful when many people are worse than I have so many better things to enjoy?

Cynicism—How can I be joyful when others are looking out only for themselves?

Negativism—How can I be joyful when nothing ever turns out right?

Keys to a Happier Life

Here are some keys to a happier life:

Love—I can be happy because of the love of family and friends—something more important than material success.

Work—I can be happy because I believe I'm doing the best job I can and can take pride in it.

Values—I can be happy because I've decided what's important to me rather than trying to keep up with the Joneses.

Acceptance—I can be happy because I don't dwell on what I can't control. I find ways of getting over bad experiences and getting on to the next thing.

Balance—I can be happy because I try to lead a balanced life with time for work and recreation and rest and prayer.

...Appreciation

"It would be totally unrealistic and unbelievable to claim that I am now living happily ever after without a single disappointment, angry moment or care in the world. No mature person expects this or even thinks it is deserved," says Nancy Brandenberger, a writer who suffered the death of one child ("never would I have been so sympathetic to others' grief had I not experienced it myself"), and the mental disability of another.

In a determined effort to count her blessings, she set aside five minutes a day and wrote down only the positive aspects of her life and closest relationships. Her list included her other children, her husband, parents, friends, material possessions and, finally, herself.

"My own personal prayer of thanks lasted two weeks. I can't pinpoint the exact day when my step became a little lighter and my smile more frequent. The awareness that the sheer magnitude of my blessings was overwhelming put me in a positively glowing mood."

...Work

Welder Joseph Spruill today finds joy in his work, something that eluded him as a teacher. "I really love my work. It makes me happy. I like making things; it gives me a feeling of pride."

"I'm just enjoying life. Construction is wide open. You never have to do the same thing every day. You don't have someone standing over you, pushing you. You just work, do a good job and enjoy it."

Decisions

Throughout life we have to make all sorts of choices, taking one route and disregarding another. Robert Frost, in his poem *The Road Not Taken*, says:

"Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—I took the one less traveled by. And that has made all the difference."

But the joy that comes when we've begun to realize our potential is only a part of it, says Leo Buscaglia, a professor of education at the University of Southern California and a noted lecturer. Another decision must be made, "a decision to recognize others and to make life easier for them, because joy comes in that, too."

"It's wonderful to reach out," Dr. Buscaglia says. When I include you in my life, I double my possibilities for joy."

Signposts

While there are no surefire ways of knowing if we're on the right road in life, certain signs can help. If we're generally involved in living each day as it comes along—sharing, laughing, loving, finding satisfaction in work well done, and even suffering with some courage—we're moving in the right direction.

Joy and peace seem to follow in those who have stuck with the search and found God's meaning for their lives.

Joy Now

Any search for earthly joy ought to include a talk with God. When we ask for help in achieving joy, we're assured of a Divine reply:

"For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds." (Mt. 7:7)

God wants us to be happy. And faith isn't supposed to be doom and gloom. In fact faith without laughter can lead to "dogmatism and self-righteousness," according to Conrad Hyers, a United Presbyterian minister and the author of *The Comic Vision and the Christian Faith: A Celebration of Life and Laughter*.

Of Jesus, he writes: "The first thing He did after starting His ministry was go on a week's vacation at the wedding feast in Cana, turning jugs of water into wine."

"It's seriousness we share with the animals. When we laugh, we're already to some extent, laughing out of, or displaying, the image of God," he says.

Joy to Come

The joy possible for us to experience now is limited. People occasionally get sidetracked in their search for total happiness. St. Augustine, for instance, found fleeting pleasure as a young man. But eventually he realized that he wouldn't find complete joy in sensuality. He concluded that God created us for Himself and that we wouldn't find rest until we rest in Him.

So, while we are meant to have joy—and there are ways to attain a degree of it in this life—it won't be a total joy. Not yet.

Real joy will be found with God. We have this promise:

No eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love Him. (1 Cor. 2:9)

The Source of Joy

Joy is the happiness of love—love aware of its own inner happiness.

Pleasure comes from without, but joy comes from within, and it is, therefore, within the reach of everyone in the world. For if there is sadness in our hearts, it is because there is not enough love.

But to be loved, we must be lovable; to be lovable, we must be good; to be good, we must know Goodness; and to know Goodness, is to love God, and neighbor, and everybody in the world.

Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen
That Tremendous Love